

Date: March 31, 2024 (Easter)

Texts: Isaiah 25. 6-9 / John 20. 19-21 (- 23...)

Title: "To Meet Him Again... for the Very First Time"

Intro -

there are times in our lives when the impressions we have of people
... come to the fore
these could be first impressions / first meetings...
could be subsequent impressions / "second" meetings...
could be at Class Reunions - people you knew well...
people you spent a lot of time with...
people with whom you parted ways, and then -
25 to 50 years later
(cf. - Greenwich High, Class of '76 here...)
"Wow! Bob. Is that really you? I didn't recognize you.
Glad they have us wear name tags...
(coupled with a pregnant pause as you each try and figure out
if that's a good thing...). (*relate re: get together with "the guys..."*)
or - the progression we may go through with our awareness of Jesus -
- a child meets him in Sunday School with foam cut-outs
and a baby doll in a manger in a Christmas play...
and then - they find themselves in a Palm Sunday Pageant,
and see Charlotte as Jesus, and -
wonder how that works...
and then - maybe a period of drifting away (while they build
lasting - or, not - relationships with those kids in H. S. ...)
and then - back in church for Christmas or Easter, and -
something about the story... something about this Jesus...
connects, and makes you wonder...
(with a pregnant pause while you work through whether or not
this is a good thing...)

cf. - on that first Easter -
the disciples met Jesus again...
for the very first time
and there was a pregnant pause as they tried to figure out -
if this was a real thing...?
if this was a good thing...?
what can we learn from them...
to move us out of our “pregnant pauses...”?

I) Traumatized

cf. - on the first Easter evening -
far from wondering if they should have lamb for dinner, or -
if God was going to declare honey-glazed ham to be
clean and acceptable for Jews to eat...
far from worrying if traffic will be heavy, or - if Uncle Harry will be there...
far from what any of us may be thinking or planning...
these disciples...
this group of people...
were traumatized (maybe Uncle Harry was with them...)
yes - they had heard Mary tell them that she had seen the Lord
but seriously -
what could she have meant by that?
and - no one else had seen him...
(dead - or alive...)
the trial... the scourging... the crucifixion... the suffering -
this is what was fresh in their minds
- possibly, the first recorded cases of PTSD...
what we call “the fog of war”
was likely the primary experience they shared:
what just happened...?
what have you heard...? (and... -

are they coming for us...?

- the fog of war... the confusion of trauma...

and the fear of what came next

such that “the doors were locked for fear of the Jews...”

and the house itself was most certainly not advertised

as their hideout...

- Jesus had been killed in such a brutal fashion,

none of them knew what kind of violence might be coming their way

key here =

their first impressions of Jesus (back three years prior, when Jesus began

his public ministry... when Jesus called them to follow...)

- left them with nothing to help in their current circumstances

sure - Jesus was a powerful teacher...

a worker of miracles...

an effective healer...

one who could feed the masses... calm the storms...

and exercise control over demons, but -

he was killed,

and nothing in what they thought they knew about him

prepared them for this

- they were understandably at a loss...

absolutely no idea what came next...

what to do next...

until...

II) Jesus Stood Among Them

... regardless of doors that were shut and locked

... regardless of hiding out in an undisclosed location...

... regardless of any barriers or defenses they might have thrown up -

Jesus came and stood among them -

and said: "Peace be with you!"
and - like at a High School or college reunion -
they looked him over...
he showed them his hands and side...
and they found his gift of peace replacing the fear
in which they had gathered -
they met him again...
for the very first time
... the very first time that they met him as
- the Risen Lord...
and they were overjoyed when they saw him
they hadn't processed everything just yet
(he still has all his hair, but - has he put on weight...?)
- they were still working all that through, but...
- their grief changed into joy...
despair turned into hope...
because - his appearance in that upper room meant that
his promises...
had come true, and - would be true

cf. - how do we... how might we...

process something like this:

meeting Jesus - who had died (and died horrifically, at that)

but was now risen... alive...

and in their midst?

relate re: some pithy sayings we as Christians sometimes throw around -

Nadia Bolz-Weber offers her thoughts on this:

"...whenever I am in a real mess of pain... or I am in some kind of
emotional suffering, and some well-meaning Christians say,

"Well, when God closes a door, he opens a window,"

I start immediately looking around for that open window -

... so I can push them out of it.

Which is to say, I don't find ignoring the difficult reality of our lives in favor of some kind of blindly cheerful optimism to be hopeful;

I find it to be delusional.

...it feels like hope can be risky, and connecting hope to suffering can be sketchy.

But maybe the way suffering produces endurance... and endurance produces character... and character produces hope...

is that suffering, endurance and character actually free us from the burden of having to be naively optimistic.

Maybe if hope isn't a very reliable starting point,

then hope is not something we strive to muster up for ourselves.

Maybe *real hope* is always something we are surprised by.

This week I started to think of hope as that which is left after all else has failed us.

And that is an Easter hope."

that is the peace... and joy... and hope -

that these fearful and despairing disciples found...

that is the peace... and joy... and hope -

God has for us:

when we also meet him again -

for the very first time

and - when we understand that hope -

is not just a warm and cozy feeling

rather - hope... grounded in the peace and joy that comes from

an encounter with the risen Lord -

this is a hope...

that is kinetic...

that makes a difference...

that sends us "out..."

III) Sent

Again, Jesus said: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me,
I am sending you."

i.e. - instead of hanging out in that hidden room and gazing at their navels -
trying to get a feel for how all this affected their sense of self and
inherent worth...

rather - they are called to action

- action such as Jesus modeled in his life and ministry
as the Father sent me, so am I sending you...

as the Father empowered me, so am I empowering you...

"And with that, he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit...'"

as the Father gave to me a charge, so am I entrusting you
with a sacred blessing...

..."If you forgive anyone their sins - they are forgiven."

i.e. - there's a lot going on here - as they meet him again...
for the very first time

(which should come as no surprise -
since everything has changed...)

i.e. - you can stay with the Jesus of your Sunday School days
(very familiar... very comforting...)

you can look to the Jesus of the glowing Victorian portraits,
with long flowing hair... piercing blue eyes - because...

nothing says "born a Jew in 1c Palestine" than
piercing blue eyes... and - a halo

or - you can meet him again...

as the Risen Lord -

who endows them with power in a manner that reminds us
of how God breathed life into Adam in Genesis...

of how God breathed life in the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel...
i.e. - Jesus' breathing the Holy Spirit on his disciples is described in a way
that brings to mind a new... second creation:
new life... new power... new calling
- as we move into a new relationship with a Jesus who died, but -
is now alive...
is now present with us...
and who offers the same empowering to us as he did for them
and what is this power... that is ours... when we meet him again...
for the very first time?

cf. - Jesus also empowered his disciples to forgive.

"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them," said Jesus (v. 23).

In this verse, Jesus was empowering his followers to
continue his mission in the world.

cf. - since the work of Jesus was all about the work of forgiveness, and
helping people to be right with God...

then the work of his followers should be all about forgiveness, and
helping people to be right with God.

this is the essence of Easter -

that Jesus is alive, and -

that his mission continues, but -

only as we meet him again, and respond, recognizing that:

we are being called into action - filled with the Spirit -
and being given the power to forgive people
and restore them to right relationships.

have you met this Jesus yet...?

- he stands... with arms outstretched -

waiting to welcome you... to enlist you...

on his team